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CLAIMS OF THE MISSIONARY WORK
UPON THE MENTAL STRENGTH
OF THE MINISTRY.

BY REV. DANIEL BLISS, OF THE SYRIA MISSION.

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY THE BOARD,

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CLAIMS OF THE MISSIONARY WORK UPON THE MENTAL STRENGTH OF THE MINISTRY.

God accomplishes his purposes in the moral as well as in the material world through secondary causes. Truth, and men to present the truth, are the instruments which he uses in converting the soul. Truth must be seen by the intellect before the will is subdued ; and the preacher of the gospel is commissioned to hold up truth sparkling with brightness before the minds of men. The conversion of the soul is not by power nor by might, but by the Spirit of God. Yet vivid exhibitions of truth precede the descent of the Spirit. God is a sovereign. He turns the hearts of men as the rivers of water are turned. There are no obstacles in his way. I will work and who shall hinder it? saith the Lord. But so far as other agencies are concerned, there are obstacles which stand in the way of the conversion of the soul. So far, then, as man has anything to do in converting the world, we may look at the work as at any other enterprise, and send our strongest and most skillful men to the most difficult part of the work.

What part of the work demands the strongest and most skillful men? Is it the missionary work, in which the preacher must tell over and over again the story of the creation, of the flood, of God's care over his

ancient people, of Christ's life, of his death, of his resurrection? Or, is it the home field, where men in Christ must be fed with strong meat; the home field, the fountain from which shall issue streams that shall make glad the city of our God; the field in which Presidents and Governors, teachers of colleges and teachers of theological seminaries are to be educated? The prevalent opinion is that the strongest men, and men of the best culture, should remain at home. This opinion is almost universal. Very few, however, will express it directly, for after saying that the best men ought to remain at home and that inferior men will do for missionaries, it would be a delicate matter to urge one to go on a mission. Although this opinion is not directly expressed, yet we learn its prevalence from the remarks respecting young men about to enter the ministry. Almost invariably, it will be said of the strongest men and men of the best culture, that they should remain in New England. It may be said of a man of strong mind but not much literary taste, that "he will stir up the people at the west." But it will be said of this third man, "He will do for a missionary." Notwithstanding this general opinion that the strongest men should remain at home, there *are* reasons which favor an opposite opinion.

I. The missionary must contend against a strong error, and should therefore himself be a strong man. Idolatry is no common foe. It has dragged down a race made in the image of God, brutalized and turned the heart of man into the heart of a beast. It is Satan's strongest ally. It entwines its ample folds around the best affections of the heart, appeals to the religious sense, and thus takes hold of all that is immortal in man. It does not attempt to shut up the religious emotions, but leads them out by a dark and dreary way.

Idolatry is wiser than atheism, and more subtle than infidelity. Atheism is foolish, because it denies the first principles of the mind. Infidelity is weak, because it scoffs at a belief in things not attested by the senses, and hence can never have universal sway. Idolatry does not, like atheism, contradict the teaching of everything above us and around us, all of which speak of God; neither does it oppose the longing of the soul after immortality, or its instinctive desire to worship. All nature and the soul of man cry out, *There is a God*. Idolatry replies, *There are lords many and gods many*. Conscience says, *God is angry with the wicked every day*. Idolatry echoes back the sound, lacerates her victims, and then casts them into the river or beneath the ponderous car to appease the wrath of offended deities. The voice of God within man's spirit cries out, *Worship*. Idolatry catches the sound and shouts aloud, *Worship, yea, worship the sun, the earth, mountains, lakes, stocks and stones, worship everything*. Here lies the strength of idolatry. It wakes up into conscious action the original faculties of the soul, appeals to feelings which pervade the recesses of the heart, and drags the spirit down to utter debasement, not by destroying, but by perverting the noblest part of our nature.

Idolatry is strong not only because it appeals to the religious sense, but because it also appeals to the worst and strongest passions of fallen man, and encourages their indulgence by the sanctities of religion. No error will cling with such tenacity to the soul as the one which fosters the base desires under the name of piety. The natural heart sinks into a more fatal depravity when she calls her sin holiness. In *this* way, idolatry has made her seat firm as the eternal hills. *This* is the system to be overthrown. The missionary work is two-fold. There is a pulling down, and a building up. In New England

the soil is already prepared for the seed, the primeval forests have fallen, the few trees which remain are scathed by the lightning and writhed by the wind, and must soon fall. But on heathen shores the land is all covered over with trees which have stood for centuries. Beneath them is the deep tangled wild-wood, briars and thorns and brambles. Into this dark forest must the missionary go, cut down tree after tree, dig up thorn after thorn, bramble after bramble ; and after he has done all this, he has like difficulties to contend against as he who sows the seed in New England. Let the missionary then have a sagacious mind to detect error, and an iron logic to pull it down.

II. Another reason why the strongest and most skillful men should be missionaries, is found in the fact, that *communicating Christian truth in language fitted to the conceptions of a heathen mind, is of all things most difficult*. If the missionary has a thought to convey, he must use the heathen's language. But it has no word adequate to convey the thought. It was never made for Christian ideas ; and never carried a Christian thought from the mind of the speaker and lodged it in the mind of the hearer. Hence the missionary is baffled at the very outset of his work. Would he simply say, " God is holy ; " he can find no word which means Jehovah, and no word which means holy. Should he use the word which means God in the language of the heathen, he would be understood to speak of an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Should he use the word which means holy in the language of the heathen, he would be understood to speak of those disgusting rites which strike a death-blow to all virtue. The missionary must learn the language of the heathen thoroughly ; he must understand the power of every word ; and then his ingenuity is taxed to the utmost, for

he is under the necessity of giving new meanings to words. He must take the language of idolatry, the vehicle in which sensuous and sensual ideas have been borne for centuries, whose very appearance and sound suggest those ideas and those only; he must take this vehicle, and without changing its appearance or sound, turn out the old idea, put in its place a pure, a spiritual conception, and send it to his hearer loaded with truth. If there ever was a work which needed a giant mind, it is the work of communicating truth in a language which has no form of words to express that truth. It demands creative power. God regenerates the heart, but man must regenerate words. The language of the heathen must be born again, before the idea of God, of holiness, of sin, of redemption can be conveyed to the mind by it. Such a renovation has taken place. Moses and the Prophets, Christ and the Apostles seized upon the language of the heathen and made it the vehicle of other conceptions. They cast out devils from men and women; they also cast out unclean spirits from the very words of the heathen, swept and garnished them, and placed in them pure thoughts. This process is going on now wherever the Christian religion is taught. The words, Atonement, Redemption, and Regeneration, were in use before they conveyed the ideas which we now attach to them; and the word Paradise, was brought from the very dregs of heathenism, where it signified a garden of sensual pleasure. It was elevated by the Jews, and signified, with them, the garden of Eden. Christ gave it a nobler meaning in that memorable reply, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Still higher is its meaning when he "who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" saith to the churches, "To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." Christian ideas were conveyed to the mind

by signs, by miracles, by the power of the Holy Spirit ; and while these ideas were blazing before the aroused attention and consciences of men, they rushed into the old vehicle of thought and made the language of the heathen radiant with a divine life. But the day of miracles is passed. Inspired men have all gone home. The missionary must, by ordinary means, convey the truths of the gospel, and change the corrupt and corrupting language of the heathen. Let the missionary have then a creative mind, a heart glowing with eloquence, so that truth shall hang upon his gesture, beam from his countenance, and flash from his eye.

III. Another reason why the strongest and most skillful men should be missionaries, is found in the fact that *they are to lay the foundations of all social reform and of religious doctrine.*

In our land the foundation is laid in the religious consciousness of an enlightened nation. The missionary is to commence anew. A mistake in the beginning is ruinous in its consequences. A defect in the acorn develops into the misshapen and gnarled oak. A fault hardly noticeable, at first, becomes a monstrosity in time. The wrong interpretation of a word, or the wrong meaning of a phrase, when laying the foundation of a religious system, works more ruin than a thousand mistakes after that system has been established. It is like the first sin of man, which taints all that come after. The errors which have racked the church since the death of the Apostles, can be traced to slight mistakes which some of the teachers in the church made in laying down the first principles of the gospel. The missionary is to make a beginning. Christianity must be planted in China, in India, in Africa, not by inspired men, nor by the aid of miracles, but by men guided by the ordinary providences

of God. It must be planted in the hearts of men, whose intellects are no less blinded, whose affections are no less corrupt, whose wills are no less obdurate than those to whom the Apostles spoke. Should the missionary lay down a false principle, philosophy will finally see it, and draw it out into a heresy, which will swallow up thousands. Should the preacher in New England make a mistake, there are ten thousand intelligent laymen to correct him; but the missionary may drop the seed of some fatal error which escapes the notice of all till it springs up like thorns to choke the truth.

Let us send, then, to lay the foundations of the gospel, men who have a clear understanding of doctrine, men of profound judgments, who are least liable to make mistakes.

IV. Another reason why the missionary work demands the strongest men is found in the fact that *a native ministry in heathen lands is to be raised up.*

It is not expected, it is not desirable, that six hundred millions of heathens should receive one million of pastors from Christian lands; but a few men are to go and preach the gospel and raise up a native ministry. The missionary then is a teacher of teachers, a leader of leaders. In New England the strongest men are sought to teach in our theological schools, and it is a wise plan, for they are to guide the guides of the church; their work is arduous; their responsibilities are great. Yet they instruct young men over whose cradles mothers prayed, around whose boyhood the sanctities of religion were thrown, whose youth was spent under the tuition of good and great men. These young men, with correct morals, with a true philosophy, need further instruction from the greatest minds, before they can teach others the truths of religion where those truths are almost universally

acknowledged. The church has decided, and wisely too, that theological professors should be strong men. But the missionary is more than a *theological* professor, for he must educate for the ministry young men over whose cradles mothers have only muttered charmed words; around whose boyhood the impurities of Idolatry have clustered; whose youth was spent under the tuition of magicians and jugglers. These young men with corrupt morals, with a false philosophy, with hearts all covered over with the plague-spot of sin, must be taught by the missionary to teach others the truths of religion, not where those truths are acknowledged, but where they are almost universally rejected. The missionary is more than a theological professor, and should be a stronger man.

V. Another reason why the strongest men should be missionaries is found in the fact *that the Bible is to be translated.*

The translation of the Bible into a language is of the greatest importance to those who speak that language. The Bible written in the mother tongue of a people, is the only sure guide in every thing that pertains to their eternal welfare.

King James, when he wished to give the English people the Bible in their own language, saw the importance and the difficulty of the work. He called forty-seven men, the ripest scholars in all England, to undertake the work, and also ordered that the Bishops should find out what men of learning there were who might assist; so that, as the King remarks, "Our said intended translation may have the help and furtherance of all our principal learned men in this our kingdom." King James showed wisdom by engaging the talents and the learning of the nation in such an important and arduous work. The Anglo-Saxon race will ever bless God for our old

English Bible. But the Anglo-Saxon race is not a sixteenth part of the world; other nations need a Bible; who shall translate it for them? They have no men among themselves who can do it; the missionary is the only man. He must translate from the original Hebrew and Greek, not into his own vernacular tongue, as did the translators of our Bible; but into a foreign language, which increases the difficulty tenfold. Yet, while we admire the sagacity of King James in choosing the greatest and best men to translate the Bible into the mother tongue of twenty millions of people, we take an opposite course ourselves, and keep our greatest men at home, and send others to translate the Bible into the mother tongues of six hundred millions of people. Let us send skillful men, men learned in the ancient and modern languages.

The missionary work demands sagacious men, men of keen, logical minds; for idolatry is a strong error. It demands men of creative minds, and men of eloquence; for the language of the heathen is deficient, and truth must be communicated by the mysterious power of eloquence, which carries conviction, though words are few and falter on a stammering tongue. It demands men of clear understanding and of profound judgment, for foundations are to be laid on which nations shall stand until time is no longer. It demands men who are skilled in philosophy, in history, in all theological learning; for the missionary is to raise up a native ministry. It demands men learned in the ancient and modern languages, and men mighty in the Scriptures, for the Bible is to be translated.

Reason teaches us that the missionary work pre-eminently demands the strongest and most skillful men of the church. But we are not shut up to reason. We have apostolic example to guide us, and the words of the Holy Spirit to direct us. Let us go back eighteen hundred

and ten years, to the city of Antioch, where the disciples were first called Christians, and learn a lesson. "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul." These five preachers were in Antioch, the Syrian metropolis, the Oriental Rome; a city upon which emperors lavished their wealth in building porticos and aqueducts, theatres and temples, walls and arches; a city which Josephus says, "without dispute deserves the place of the third city in the world, both in magnitude and in other marks of prosperity." In this city, the home of Roman governors, the resort of pleasure-loving citizens, visited by poets, filled with Chaldean astrologers, Jewish impostors, and a worthless rabble of Greeks and Orientals; in this large city are only five ministers. There was a church in Antioch, and never did a church need more watchful care than this. It had just sprung up from the depths of oriental superstition and pharisaic formality. There were foes without and foes within, which threatened to destroy the new religion. All the arguments which are urged in favor of keeping the best men at home, will apply with greater force to the case before us. Antioch was the centre from which Christianity was to radiate, the fountain which should send forth waters for the healing of the nations. It stood in more danger than any modern city or church of being overcome by infidelity and superstition. If the Christians of Antioch had had the same views on the subject of missions as we have, and if one of their number had proposed that two of the five ministers should leave that city, which was nearly as large as New York, and go on a mission, he would have been called a fanatic. And if some one had proposed that the two most learned, most eloquent

should go, he would have been called a monomaniac. But God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts; for as these five preachers "ministered to the Lord and fasted," the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them." Notice whom the Holy Ghost called. It is not Simeon or Manaen, but Barnabas, the son of consolation, the son of prophecy; Barnabas, who was so majestically benignant, and so dignified in his bearing, that the idolatrous Lycaonians supposed that Jupiter, the father of gods and of men, had come among them. The words are, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul;" Saul, not Lucius. Saul is called the last and most illustrious of the Apostles; whose youth was spent in the study of the Scriptures; whose ear was familiar with the Greek, the Hebrew and the Latin tongues; whose mind was trained to logical acuteness; whose memory was well stored with hard sentences of old; whose love for Greek literature led him to quote the poets in his public addresses; he, who had seen the Lord Jesus in the way; a man of powerful intellect; of great insight into the foundations of natural theology and of moral philosophy; a man of the sublimest eloquence; of a fearless independence; of the noblest patriotism; the generous, courteous, self-denying Saul, is called; *called by the Holy Spirit; called from Antioch; called to the missionary work.*

If the missionary work does not demand the greatest men in the church, why were Barnabas and Saul called to that work? I seem to hear a hundred voices answer, "The work did demand the greatest men then, but things have changed." Things have changed! What things? Has human nature changed? The character of the heathen to-day is essentially that of the heathen eighteen hundred years ago. The description which Paul gave of

them in his letter to the Romans, will apply, every word of it, to the heathen now living on the earth. Things have changed! What things? The law still stands, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law." The only hope of salvation is still Christ Jesus. The conditions of salvation are still faith and repentance. "Go teach all nations," are still living words. Sixty souls every minute of time still drop into eternity. Things have changed! Pray what things? Does a community in Boston, does this community in Andover, in which is lodged more religious truth than could be found in the whole city of Antioch, this community walled about by Bibles, supported by the sentiments of a Christian age, shielded by the prayers of ten thousand saints, does this community demand a greater teacher than the missionary work demands, when the community of Antioch, full of errors, surrounded by idolatry, dragged down by the licentious customs of a corrupt age, did not demand as great a teacher as that same work demanded? Opinions may change, but principles never.

The Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul." Christ taught humiliation by example; the Holy Ghost taught how to select missionaries by giving an example. But the churches, either by not seeing the fearful condition of the heathen, or by supposing that a congregation in New England of a thousand souls, is more important than all else, or from desiring the best things for themselves; the churches, for one or for all these reasons combined, reverse the decision of the Spirit, and keep the greatest men at home.

When a church in New England, thoroughly imbued with the doctrines of the cross, rooted and grounded in the faith, wishes to call a pastor, she hears many sermons from many men, and then says, Separate me Saul or

Barnabas for Christian Antioch; Simeon and Lucius and Manaen will do for missionaries. Christian brethren, there is something wrong somewhere. There is something wrong, not only in keeping the greatest men at home, but in keeping so many men at home. Let us look again at Antioch and learn of the Holy Spirit. Antioch was as wide in extent as the City of Boston, and contained more than four times as many people; and yet two of the five preachers were called from it to other labors. They were sent away not because Antioch did not need them, but because Macedonia needed them more. There are twelve orthodox pastors in Boston, and every gale that sweeps from the East brings to our ears the cry, "Come over and help us;" but no one goes—why? The voice of the Spirit is hushed. He only speaks through the word of God and by the still small voice in the believer's heart. Yet should the Holy Spirit speak once again in audible tones, I doubt not he would say to the twelve preachers in Boston, and to many other twelve preachers, who dwell so near together and have the charge of so few people, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul and Simeon for the work whereunto I have called them;" let only Manaen and Lucius remain to break the bread of life for the few thousands, while these go to the perishing millions who have no bread.

At this hour, within five miles of Boston, there are not less than twenty preachers of one faith, speaking to congregations whose numbers, taken collectively, will not equal twice the number of souls often gathered in one assembly. Who can give a rational reason why these twenty congregations ought not to assemble in five places of worship instead of twenty, and listen to five preachers, while the other fifteen are plucking heathen as brands from the burning?

Is there one whose heart has been touched by the

power of divine love, that would refuse to go five miles every Sabbath, and sit in a crowded congregation, if thereby he could let his pastor go to the heathen and save souls from the death that never dies ?

I know it is pleasant to have the church near our dwelling, and to have but few in our seats ; and all this we may have, if we will settle a pastor in every little village and neighborhood, and at the corner of every street ; but I had rather go twice five miles, and stand all day in the door of the house of God, than to hear the wail of a lost soul, which had perished because I chose to live at ease in Zion. The church of God in New England must awake ; she must put on a self-sacrificing spirit ; she must give up her best sons and her best daughters. Christian brethren, let us go home to our closets and pray God to open our eyes to the fearful condition of eight hundred millions of perishing souls. Let us look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let us deny ourselves a feast, that the heathen may taste a little ; and then we and they may enter in through the gates into the city, and feast upon the fruits of the tree of life, which grows on either side of the river of the water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb.

The foregoing Address was delivered by Rev. DANIEL BLISS, now a missionary in Syria, at his graduation from the Theological Seminary in Andover, Ms., in the summer of 1855. It is thought worthy of a place in our series of Missionary Tracts.

